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ABSTRACT

This report describes the proceedings of a symposium on rural preschool education, one of four conferences in a Council of Europe preschool project relating to equal educational opportunity. Delegates from 19 European countries participated. Included in this report are summaries of a paper on the ecology of childhood (discussing the background of social change in rural areas) and a paper dealing with the use of television in preschool education which cited the need for coordination of resources among European countries. Conference groups discussed three main themes: (1) types of preschools provided in sparsely populated areas; (2) problems connected with establishing preschool facilities in such areas; and (3) methods which have proven most successful and cost effective. Texts of the reports and recommendations of the three discussion groups (English-speaking, French-speaking and mixed) are included (in English). Discussions on types of preschools focused on the special characteristics of sparsely populated areas, the compensatory role of the preschool, and the relevance of urban norms and values to the rural situation. Discussions on problems and methods dealt with differing home and school environments, school-family relationships, school and agency roles, staff and staff training, physical facilities and materials, use of media, and cooperation with the primary schools. (BF)

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PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN LIVING IN SPARSELY POPULATED AREAS

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COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL CO-OPERATION
Committee for General and Technical Education
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1977

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COMMITTEE FOR GENERAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Symposium on

"Pre-school education for children living in sparsely populated areas"

Storlien (Sweden), 11-16 September 1977

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Council of Europe's Committee for General and Technical Education convened the fourth and last of the symposia in its pre-school project at Storlien in Sweden, 11-16 September 1977. Since the Storlien symposium dealt specifically with pre-school education for children living in sparsely populated areas, it was fitting that the conference should have been held in the beautiful region of Jämtland in Sweden, an area both mountainous and sparsely populated. There the delegates to the conference were enabled to experience a brief but valuable confrontation with the situation and surroundings of children and their teachers in one area of the kind under discussion.

2. This symposium was the last of four constituting the Council's pre-school project, the preceding three having been held in Versailles, Berlin and Bournemouth. The pre-school project was set up in 1975 and arose from a resolution relating to equality of educational opportunity for all, adopted in 1969 at the VIth Conference of the European Ministers of Education. The symposia held before the beginning of the pre-school project, and the previous three symposia of this series dealt with:

- aims, methods and problems in pre-school education (Venice),
- the training of teachers for this section of education (Leyden),
- the link between pre-school and primary education (Versailles),
- the establishment of continuity between those two areas (Bournemouth), and
- pre-school education for migrant children (Berlin).

There remained to be discussed at Storlien the specific problems arising with regard to the provision of pre-school education in sparsely populated areas.

3. The countries represented at the symposium differed widely in respect to the age at which compulsory schooling began. Hence the term "pre-school education" had a different meaning in different contexts. Delegates were reminded of the fact that the symposium held in Venice in October 1971, had taken note of this fact and had offered the following definition of the term:

> "The participants agreed that pre-school education included the period of life from birth to the start of compulsory schooling." (v. doc. CCC/EGT (71) 46 Pre-school education - aims, methods and problems, p. 18)

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4. The symposium was chaired by Ms Annika Baude, Head of Division at the National Board of Health and Welfare in Stockholm. Its Director was Ms Siv Thorsell, Head of Division at the National Board of Health and Welfare, and its Assistant Director was Ms Brita Holm, also of the National Board. The Swedish Minister for Social Affairs at the Ministry of Health and Welfare, Mr Rune Gustavsson, attended the opening of the conference and delivered an address of welcome on behalf of the Swedish Government, which was host to the symposium. The Council of Europe was represented by Mr Victor de Pange, Deputy Director of Education and Head of the Division for General and Technical Education.

5. The work programme of the symposium consisted of:

i. the presentation of reports by delegates

ii. the presentation of the Director's study document to the working groups

iii. study visits to pre-school establishments in Jämtland

iv. meetings of working groups

v. a final plenary session to discuss and ratify the final report and recommendations of the symposium to the Council for Cultural Co-operation.

6. Three working groups met for discussion during the symposium, an English-speaking group, a French-speaking group and a mixed group. The chairmen and rapporteurs of these groups were:

English-speaking group

Chairman: Ms G Lagerbielke (Sweden)

Rapporteur: Mrs R Peacocke (United Kingdom)

French-speaking group

Chairman: Miss M Abbadie (France)

Rapporteur: Miss Y Jaumain (Belgium)

Mixed group

Chairman: Dr. W E Fthenakis (Federal Republic of Germany)

Rapporteurs: Mrs J Terny (France)

Mr S Holland (Ireland)

The chairmen and rapporteurs of the groups held brief meetings with the general rapporteur and officials of the symposium as the conference proceeded.

7. Delegates from 19 countries participated in the symposium. Observers attended from Norway, Sweden and Yugoslavia and from four teachers' organisations. A list of participants can be found in Appendix A.

8. The delegates enjoyed a number of social occasions and leisure activities in the course of the week.

i. On Sunday 11 September, delegates were invited to a welcome dinner given by the County Council of Jämtland at the Högfjällshotel where the symposium was held. A speech of welcome was given by the Chairman of the County Council. The dinner was attended by Mr Rune Gustavsson, Minister for Social Affairs, who had opened the symposium in the afternoon.

ii. After dinner on Monday evening, 12 September, delegates were entertained by a girls' choir, whose conductor had brought them 160 kilometers from the island where they lived to give a performance of songs and dances.

iii. On Tuesday 13 September, after visiting schools in the area, the symposium welcomed to dinner at the Högfjällshotel teachers and head teachers from the schools they had visited, an inspector of schools and an education committee chairman. After dinner, an informal session was held in the conference hall, during which the guests spoke and answered delegates' questions.

iv. During the afternoon of Thursday 15 September, some delegates enjoyed an excursion into Norway, where they visited Trondheim.

v. On Thursday evening, 15 September, a farewell dinner was given by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. By Thursday evening the main work of the delegates had been completed and the dinner was a light-hearted occasion. Ms Annika Baude, Chairman of the symposium made a farewell speech, expressing thanks to those whose special efforts had contributed to the success of the conference. Mr S Holland replied on behalf of the delegates.

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II. ADDRESSES, LECTURES AND STUDY VISITS

1. Mr Rune Gustavsson, Minister for Social Affairs at the Ministry of Health and Welfare, formally opened the symposium on behalf of the Swedish Government. He spoke of the suitability of Storlien as the location for a conference concerned with sparsely populated areas. Although this term might have different connotations in different countries, there were factors common to people living in all sparsely populated areas. The Swedish Government felt that its responsibility towards the inhabitants of rural areas was to ensure they shared the benefits enjoyed by the inhabitants of urban areas. He spoke of two experimental schemes which had been introduced in Sweden, namely the provision of pre-school education for Lapp children and the setting up of circulating schools in rural areas. He expressed the hope that the symposium at Storlien would bring forth solutions to the problems inherent in providing pre-school education in sparsely populated areas.

2. Ms Annika Baude, Chairman of the symposium, thanked Mr Gustavsson for his presence at the opening of the symposium, which was an expression both of his interest in European co-operation and of his concern for the issues to be discussed in Storlien. Through him, she thanked the Swedish Government for sponsoring and hosting the symposium.

She expressed her appreciation of the work done by the Council of Europe in focussing attention on pre-school education, and thanked Mr Victor de Pange and his assistants for their help in preparing and organising the symposium.

She welcomed delegates and observers to Storlien, and hoped both that they would derive pleasure from a week spent in such a beautiful mountain area, and that their surroundings would bring home to them the advantages and the disadvantages of living in such a remote part of the country.

3. Mr Victor de Pange, Deputy Director of Education in the Council of Europe, also welcomed delegates and observers to the symposium. He thanked the Swedish authorities for their generous hospitality, and the officials of the National Board of Health and Welfare who were to steer the proceedings of the symposium.

He outlined the origins, constitution and aims of the Council of Europe, and then spoke of the Council for Cultural Co-operation's pre-school project and the antecedents of the Storlien symposium.

4. Ms G Lagerbielke and Ms I Samuelsson presented to the members of the symposium an exhibition dealing with a pilot project in pre-school education in sparsely populated areas in Sweden, which was on display in the conference hall throughout the week. They spoke of the dual purpose of the pre-school, that of child-minding and that of educating the child, and showed how the two purposes

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merged in the modern Swedish pre-school. They outlined the variety of provisions existing to cater for the needs of pre-school children, namely, day nurseries, part-time groups, family day-care, open pre-schools, play groups and leisure-time centres. Also on display was a series of six posters (produced also in postcard form) aimed at informing parents and administrators about the importance of pre-school education.

Ms Lagerbielke also showed slides to illustrate how pre-school education was provided for children in rural areas in Sweden.

5. Lecture on "The ecology of childhood" by Professor Rita Liljeström.

i. Professor Liljeström's lecture set the conference's deliberations about pre-school education against the background of social change which had taken place in rural areas. She reviewed the differences between patterns of social interaction existing in rural and urban areas, the changing patterns of family life, and the problems facing families with children, whether they remained in a rural area or succumbed to the pressures on them to migrate to urban settlements.

ii. The role of the child in the family was examined historically. A problem facing the rural family today was the fact that rural depopulation had made the concept of the rural settlement as a living, self-renewing organism almost obsolete. The role played by parents and siblings in the child's development had become increasingly important. At the same time the science of child care had become more and more specialised and professionalised, often giving rise to feelings of ignorance and inadequacy in parents, who no longer felt supported by generally accepted social norms.

iii. The pre-school could not wholly compensate for deficiencies in the child's experience caused by the decay of rural settlements. In fact there was a sense in which it could be said to promote the alienation of the child from the world of adults. This danger should be recognised, and one of the goals of pre-school education should be to re-integrate the child with adult social life. Another important aspect of the role of the rural pre-school was to provide an opportunity for the child, often living in isolated circumstances, to meet and relate to his peers.

The mission of the pre-school should be to make the best use of current knowledge of child psychology and child development, while at the same time seeking out means of co-operation with parents and the local community, in order to root the child's social experience firmly in his own familiar surroundings.

6. Lecture on "The use of television in pre-school education" by Professor Dr K Schleicher.

Professor Schleicher had submitted to the Committee for General and Technical Education a detailed paper entitled The use of television in pre-school education in sparsely populated areas, which was circulated to delegates before the symposium began (doc. CCC/EGT (77) 26).

In addressing the conference, Professor Schleicher said he wished to base his lecture on the following premises:

a. the mass media had great influence on children, largely through programmes intended for adults,

b. programme creators largely ignored the situation and needs of the rural child,

c. pre-school teachers were usually not well-informed about children's consumption of the media, and were untrained in the use of the media in education,

d. there was little co-ordination among European countries in creating programmes for the pre-school child,

e. there was a lack of research relating to the interdependence of learning from the family, the media and institutions.

He then proceeded to elaborate two aspects of his paper, firstly, the need for co-ordinated co-operation among the different services available, between these services and their clients and between practitioners and theorists, and secondly, the advantages of co-ordinated action amongst European countries.

1. The need for co-ordinated co-operation between services

Educational policies were often unsatisfactory because they were based on fragmented approaches. A human-ecological dimension would help to safeguard the physical and mental health of children. Since research findings revealed an increasing percentage of young children having health problems, behaviour difficulties and learning handicaps, and since factors rooted in family attitudes and behaviour were of prime importance in influencing a child's later development, even before he entered pre-school, it was essential that early childhood education should start from birth. Medical, social and educational services should be co-ordinated to formulate prophylactic strategies, in order to break the cycle of deprivation in which so many families were caught. These services, which had, historically, separate functions, were now seen to be interdependent.

With respect to isolated children in rural areas, Professor Schleicher stated that:

a. rural dwellers, both adults and children, watched more television than town dwellers. While the media could counteract the isolation of country life, they nevertheless usually presented material ill-matched to the life style and experience of rural children, and programme-makers neglected opportunities of compensating for the limitations of isolated rural children, teachers and parents in the field of education;

b. educational and social services, to operate effectively in rural areas, should be not only integrated but also decentralised;

c. education should take account of the basic needs of each individual child in his environment, and should stress standards and values relevant to the rural community.

ii. The Appalachian project

Professor Schleicher next gave an account of the American Appalachian project to show how:

a. child development in rural areas might be planned using a supra-regional, multi-media approach, while allowing for local adjustment;

b. educational programmes could be developed in a context of social and economic measures.

Since its authorisation by Congress in 1965, the Appalachian Regional Commission had implemented numerous projects aimed at "systematic provision of health, nutritional, educational and social services to families and children to ensure the best possible growth of persons", and had developed a range of teaching aids for educators, parents and home visitors.

iii. Conclusions

In the task of bringing about an improvement in the infrastructure of rural areas recommended by the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly in 1976, the media could contribute by facilitating the co-ordination of health, educational and social services. In addition, further steps should be taken towards the joint production of programmes by the various European broadcasting corporations and towards the setting up of a programme bank.

7. Study visits

On Tuesday 13 September, members of the symposium visited four schools in the Åre municipality, pre-schools at Ånn, Åre and Undersåker, and a residential school for the children of nomadic Lapps at Ange. The pre-schools visited each served several neighbouring villages, and catered for children of five and six years old. Children were collected by bus and attended pre-school for two days a week, for five hours each day. Each class was in the charge of a trained teacher, assisted by an auxiliary, and in some cases a trainee teacher who was doing a period of teaching practice. Teachers operated in more than one pre-school during the week. One of the schools catered for children below the age of five, who were given day-nursery care while their mothers were at work.

Delegates were informed that parents paid fees for their children's pre-school education on a scale related to parental income.

At the boarding school for Lapp children, delegates witnessed the teaching of the traditional Lapp crafts of wood-work, metal-work and embroidery, and listened to traditional songs of the Lapp people. It was clear that attempts were being made to maintain a consciousness of their native identity and culture among these children, and a certain amount of time is devoted to the teaching of Lapp languages in the school curriculum. At the same time, it seems that the predominant use of Swedish as the language of communication and instruction, the separation of the children from their parents for prolonged periods of schooling, and the economic pressures brought to bear on them after leaving school, must inevitably weaken their ties with the traditional Lapp way of life and contribute to the erosion of this minority culture.

One overriding impression left with the delegates, which called forth general comment both during and after the visits, was that made by the very high standard of material provision in these schools. Buildings, furnishings and equipment seemed to many delegates - accustomed to less lavish provision - to be of a luxurious standard and in abundant supply. Indeed this observation gave rise to some debate, and some concluded that such lavish appointments were unnecessary and even inadvisable.

Before returning to the conference centre, delegates took the cabin cable lift for the ascent of the Åreskutan mountain. Two lasting memories of the day's excursion will certainly be the sight of the snow-covered mountain top, and the smiling faces of the Lapp children as they bade their visitors hail and farewell.

III. CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

1. Aims of the symposium

The aims of the symposium, as formulated in the draft programme, were to:

a. study types of provision of pre-school education in sparsely populated areas in CCC member states;

b. identify problems connected with establishing pre-school facilities in sparsely populated areas in view of practical and social conditions, traditions, cultural values etc;

c. identify the methods (for example, mobile pre-school bus, bussing, TV programmes) which have proved most successful and cost effective;

d. make recommendations on the subject of the symposium to CCC member states and the Council of Europe in the light of the discussions on (a), (b) and (c).

2. Presentation of reports

Reports on pre-school education in the various countries represented at the symposium were distributed to delegates either before or during the conference week. Some of these were national reports, presenting an overall picture of current practices in the area of pre-school education. One, the report of the Nordic working party, was supranational in character. Others reported on strategies adopted in providing pre-school education in a particular rural region, like the Devon report from the United Kingdom, the Massif Central report from France, and the Swedish report on the education of the Lapps. Yet others reported on one aspect of work bearing on pre-school education, like Professor Schleicher's report on the use of television, the report on the research project in compensatory education for children in isolated areas, carried out in the Staatsinstitut für Frühpädagogik in Munich, and the Austrian report on the project "Play - an element of life". In addition to these, delegates received a preliminary report on the subject of the symposium (document CCC/EGT (76) Misc 17) and a paper drafted by the symposium director entitled Issues to be discussed in the working groups.

Many of these reports were presented to the conference in the early plenary sessions by delegates from the countries which had submitted the reports. The experience thus shared of strategies attempted and solutions found in the different member states formed an invaluable basis of knowledge for the subsequent deliberations of the working groups and for the recommendations which emerged from them.

3. Issues discussed in working groups.

In the last plenary session before the working groups began their discussions, the director of the symposium, Ms Siv Thorsell, presented to the participants an expanded form of her preliminary document Issues to be discussed in the working groups. Within the framework of the four aims referred to earlier (v III (i) - Aims of the symposium), and using the experience of the reports presented, she raised a number of vital questions which she recommended the groups should discuss. They are summarised below.

a. Types of provision of pre-school education in sparsely populated areas in CCC member states

What are the special characteristics of sparsely populated areas?

How can they be compared with those of urban areas?

Can and should the pre-school play a compensatory role?

Are urban norms and values relevant to a rural situation?

b. Problems connected with establishing pre-school facilities in sparsely populated areas

Should pre-school education match the needs of the child in his own environment?

How far should parental wishes be respected?

Should the pre-school become a focal point in community life?

What agency/agencies should take the initiative in establishing a pre-school?

c. Methods which have proved most successful and cost-effective

The following themes were put forward for consideration:

- contact and co-operation with families,
- staff and staff training,
- suitability of premises and equipment,
- educational materials,
- school bussing and travelling time,
- organisational models,
- use of the media,
- co-operation with primary schools.

On the basis of their discussion of these themes, working groups were requested to make recommendations to the Council for Cultural Co-operation and to CCC member states.

4. Consolidated report of proceedings of working groups.

It is interesting to note that before considering the more concrete questions raised in the director's document, all three groups felt impelled to record that living in a sparsely populated area was only one factor among others that affected children's development, and that other factors like poverty, isolation caused by a variety of circumstances, lack of contact with parents etc could be found equally in large cities and in sparsely populated areas. The French-speaking group felt that the central issue should be the right of the child to be helped to develop, rather than compensation for living in a sparsely populated area, as the fact of living in such an area could have advantages and disadvantages. It was felt that the Devon report (document CCC/EGT (76) 39) had presented a balanced and sympathetic profile of the rural child's situation, and all concurred with the words of that report that "difference should not be confused with defect". All groups felt that pre-school education was the right of all children, whatever their background. Because of this unanimity of feeling, the first general recommendation to be placed before the symposium was preceded by the affirmation that pre-school education is the right of every child.

Further deliberations of the three working groups are summarised below under the three headings of the director's study document.

a. <u>Types of provision of pre-school education in sparsely populated areas in CCC member states</u>

1. All three groups thought it unsatisfactory to define a sparsely populated area in terms of population density, because of the great variety of conditions existing in different countries. The French-speaking group offered as a definition the following: a sparsely populated area is one where the numbers of pupils, for a variety of reasons, fall below the norms required for forming pre-school classes in the country in which it is situated. The mixed group felt that too little information was available about factors relating to the needs of pupils in these areas and therefore wished to place before the symposium a recommendation that a detailed analysis of the political, economic and sociological features of rural areas should be carried out, in order to determine what steps should be taken in the member states to provide satisfactory pre-school education.

2. The English-speaking group dealt with the question of the social network which was set aside by the French-speaking group because members were not sure how to interpret the question. The English-speaking group described the social network as including:

- relationships within the home,
- interaction of family with community,
- effects of the media and local resources,

- support given by key persons in the community,
- professional help from public services,

and stressed that co-operation between all these was essential in family care.

3. In answering the third question, the French-speaking group found the Devon report a useful basis for its discussion and concluded that the reasons laid out on pp 14-16 of that report reflected their opinions and satisfactorily set out the arguments for pre-school education in both rural and urban areas. They also agreed largely with the profile of the rural pre-school child described on pp 19-21 of the same report and endorsed the reasons for the desirability of compensation such as can be provided by experience in a pre-school class.

The mixed group drew attention also to the particular difficulties of rural communities, where the population was isolated because of communication difficulties, lacked material provisions and social services, and in some cases was subject to disturbing changes due to the infiltration of urban values into their environment, at the expense of rural values. They formulated a recommendation designed to meet this need of sparsely populated areas, which was incorporated into the first recommendation. However, the English-speaking group in considering the need for compensating for the disadvantages of sparsely populated areas warned against over-emphasis on socio-economic and cultural differences between urban and rural areas, for fear of worsening rather than improving the situation, and also warned against forgetting the advantages of life in a sparsely populated area. All groups, however, showed themselves to be aware of this danger and agreed that it is as important to exploit the strengths of rural children as to fill the gaps in their experience. The English-speaking group also stressed the necessity of meeting the basic needs of individual children in a manner appropriate to their specific circumstances. They identified the changes they found necessary as follows:

- co-ordination of available services;
- involvement and participation of parents to ensure the effectiveness of the provisions made;
- continuous discussion at all levels between those responsible for the stability and care of the family.

They based a four-part recommendation on this part of their discussion.

b. <u>Identification of the problems connected with establishing pre-school facilities in sparsely populated areas in view of practical and social conditions, traditions, cultural values etc</u>

The mixed group outlined the main problems of sparsely populated areas in the discussion preceding their recommendation about meeting the specific needs of the child. The English-speaking group attacked

this area by citing the main problems of each country represented in the group. While financial difficulties represented a difficulty in many countries, the second most common problem was that of how to secure the participation of parents. Negative attitudes to pre-school education in some regions were mentioned. Distance and transport difficulties were also mentioned, and, in connection with this, the problem of deciding whether to bring the school to the children or the children to the school. Real fears existed in some areas for the future of village schools if pre-school pupils were transported from their village to another centre. The effect of isolation on the teachers was another problem mentioned. One delegate posed the problem of formulating a philosophy of pre-school education, which would determine what methods were adopted at this stage of the child's education.

The French-speaking group would seem to have taken the problem of isolation of communities and families as the basis of their recommendations. With regard to rural schools they proposed that:

- they should play a revitalising role in rural life;
- they should ensure that the child remains secure in his environment while awakening in him a curiosity about, and an understanding of, the wider world;
- they should make a special effort to establish contact with parents, who suffer from the effects of isolation no less than their children. Thus the school will have a beneficial effect on community relations, as well as itself benefitting from parental involvement.

This group concluded their discussion by noting that the variety of solutions possible proved that there was no ready-made model of pre-school provision, indeed that the ability to adapt to the local situation was the key to success. Since this idea was expressed in all three groups, it was felt important to recommend that a diversity of solutions would be preferable to adopting one ready-made model, and that flexibility must be the key to success.

c. Identification of the methods which have proved most successful and cost effective

i. Co-operation with the children's families was seen to be a vital ingredient in the success of pre-school education, and the following practical suggestions were put forward. The first three were endorsed by all groups in their discussions.

- involvement and participation by all parents in a wide variety of activities within pre-school establishments;
- meetings for parents (and other concerned adults) and/or conferences attended jointly by parents and teachers;
- extra-mural activities and practical help given by parents on special occasions.

The following, more specific, suggestions emanated from the English-speaking group:

- home visiting by teachers on the staff of the pre-school and by advisory teachers;
- media libraries;
- extra group sessions for younger children and their families.

The following emanated from the mixed group:

- establishment of parents' committees or associations;
- establishment of government-aided bodies to promote the physical and mental welfare of children.

This last group formulated a recommendation relating to the training of teachers in establishing relationships with parents.

ii. Staff and staff training

All groups were agreed that high standards of training were necessary for pre-school teachers in sparsely populated areas, and endorsed the recommendations made at the symposia of Leyden and Versailles. It was generally felt that:

- the training and qualifications for pre-school teachers should in no way be inferior to those of primary teachers;
- teachers in rural schools should, if possible, have enough experience and training to enable them to support children and families in isolated areas, particularly in view of the frequent lack of specialised services in country districts;
- in-service training is particularly important for teachers in sparsely populated areas.

In addition to these three suggestions, the French-speaking group felt that:

- teachers working in rural pre-school establishments should have some previous experience of pre-school work in other areas;

the English-speaking group felt that:

- the younger the child, the greater the necessity for a more generous teacher/child ratio;

and the mixed group felt that:

- pre-school teachers should receive specific training in appreciating the educational value of play materials, and in the choosing and evaluation of such materials.

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iii. Premises, equipment and materials

These two sections were generally considered together by the groups, and there was a large degree of consensus about the following points:

- Educators, architects and interested members of the community should co-operate in building or adapting premises which provide an environment to match the needs of pre-school children.

- Pre-school classes should be held in one, neutral, single-purpose building.

- Equipment and material should be relevant to the needs of the pre-school child. They should be simple, easy to move, able to be adapted to many purposes, and, whenever possible, natural materials should be used and environmental resources exploited.

- Families and other interested members of the community should be invited to help in producing or providing materials for pre-school use. Such co-operation would strengthen the links between school, family and community.

- Equipment and material likely to cause accidents or to be harmful to young children should be avoided.

- Teacher training should include training in the selection and use of materials, including the productions of the mass media. (This point was also made by the mixed group with regard to teacher training).

- Advice should be available to parents and children, as well as to teachers, on the selection and use of mass media productions. The French-speaking group warned against the practical unsuitability of much of the material produced by the media for use with very young children and felt that it was a poor substitute for experiences gained from the give-and-take of relationships with other children and with adults.

- Teachers should be invited to advise television companies on the production of programmes suitable for use by children, teachers and parents.

iv. Transport

- Where possible, journeys should be avoided, but where transport has to be provided serious consideration must be given to the mode of transport, the length and timing of the journey, and the need for supervision both during the journey and the waiting time.

- The French-speaking group wished to limit travelling time to a maximum of 30 minutes, feeling that it would be preferable to employ a peripatetic teacher for pupils who needed to travel for longer than 30 minutes to reach a pre-school centre.

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- The English-speaking group and the mixed group felt there was a need for research into the question of pre-school transport in sparsely populated areas.

v. Models of organisation

The groups' reports constantly stressed the need for a pre-school education tailored to the specific needs of the individual child in his particular environment. It follows from this that the members of the symposium had no wish to recommend any one organisational model. The opinion of the French-speaking group, expressed in a statement quoted previously in this report, namely that flexibility is the key to success, seems admirably to sum up the general consensus of feeling among members of the conference, that only such flexibility, combined with an imaginative use of available resources, will produce styles of pre-school provision appropriate to such a wide variety of needs.

Mention should also be made of the concern of the French-speaking group lest financial considerations should

either a. restrict the development of pre-school education for all children

or b. debar any individual child from receiving pre-school education because of the limited economic circumstances of his family.

This group would argue for the free provision of pre-school education wherever necessary.

vi. Co-operation with the primary school

Finally, looking ahead towards the next stage of the child's education, the conference saw co-operation with the primary school as being extremely important, indeed indispensable. However it was recognised that such co-operation is often difficult to achieve. Two suggestions made by the French-speaking group were that:

- communication between pre-school and primary teachers should be made easier,

- co-ordination of the two sectors could be facilitated if all personnel concerned came under the responsibility of the same local education authority body.

The English-speaking group wished to draw the attention of the conference to the comments and recommendations relating to this subject proposed at the Bournemouth symposium in March 1977 (see doc. CCC/EGT (77) 20).

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the group discussions of the document presented to the conference by the Director, certain statements frequently recurred, indicating that certain common convictions united the conference in taking up a positive, well-defined attitude towards the question of pre-school education in sparsely populated areas. This consensus of feeling can be expressed in one general recommendation (1) and one statement of agreed attitudes (2).

1. Considering that:

every child has the right to receive a pre-school education, which should complement the education he receives at home, during the period from birth to the beginning of compulsory schooling,

one of the goals of pre-school education is to reduce inequalities, whatever their origin,

this education should be matched to the specific needs of the child, and should be preventive in concept,

financial restrictions should neither restrict the development of pre-school education for all children, nor debar any individual child from receiving pre-school education because of the limited economic circumstances of his family

It is recommended that:

member states do all within their power to provide for pre-school education in sparsely populated areas,

such provision be matched to the specific needs of each group of children, preserving and developing their local culture, while at the same time leading them towards a knowledge of and respect for other cultures.

2. Members of the symposium were agreed that:

living in a sparsely populated area is only one factor among others that affect children's development and that other factors like poverty, isolation caused by a variety of circumstances, lack of contact with parents, etc, could be found equally in large cities and in sparsely populated areas,

it is unsatisfactory to define a sparsely populated area in terms of population density, because of the great variety of conditions existing in different countries,

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in attempting to "compensate" sparsely populated areas we should guard against placing too much emphasis on the disavantages of life in such areas, and remind ourselves of the fact that children in such areas enjoy very real advantages, often not shared by their urban counterparts, such as are described in the Devon report (pp. 20-21) presented to the conference.

Further recommendations are grouped under three headings taken from the Director's study document.

a. Types of provision of pre-school education in sparsely populated areas in CCC member states

3. Considering that:

the following important changes are necessary to further the provision of pre-school education:

the co-ordination and extension of available services in order to create a variety of types of provision appropriate to the needs of each area and the persons in it,

the involvement, participation and education of parents, without which no form of provision can be fully effective,

continuous discussion and interaction at all levels between the education, social and health services available to families living in sparsely populated areas

It is recommended that:

through the development of effective co-ordination of available resources and services in sparsely populated areas, parents as well as children should be helped to uphold and enhance constructive relationships within the family and the community,

any action taken on behalf of children from birth to school age must form part of a wider framework of support for individual families and the small community as a whole,

the parameters of pre-school education shall include the basic individual and environmental needs of children,

effective alternative provision for scattered areas must depend on the close partnership of parents, children, pre-school education, the local community and the providers of these facilities.

4. Considering that:

children in rural areas have too often been considered disadvantaged in comparison with their urban counterparts,

It is recommended that:

while it would not be desirable to get rid of the differences which exist between children from different backgrounds, it is desirable to stimulate and strengthen every child in the realisation of his own individual potential.

5. Considering that:

the conference does not possess enough information about the different regions and the factors which determine the specific needs of each child,

It is recommended that:

the Council for Cultural Co-operation should undertake a detailed analysis of the features relevant to rural areas in order to draw up a list of means essential for the promotion of pre-school education in such areas in all the member states.

b. Identification of the problems connected with establishing pre-school facilities in sparsely populated areas

6. Considering that:

the range of problems (excluding internationally recognised financial strictures) includes,

relating the child's identity to the cultures and values of the community in which he lives in such a way that he becomes the subject, and not the object, of the endeavour,

the need to provide appropriate facilities and help for the education of children with special difficulties,

parental reluctance to understand and to accept pre-school education and the difficulties involved in getting the right kind of information to the general public,

the danger of a teacher's personal and professional capacities being affected by living and working in an isolated area,

the difficulties involved in making close and effective links between pre-school and parents and between pre-school and primary school

It is recommended that:

there should be no relaxation of effort to make the general public and those who administer their affairs increasingly aware of the importance of the early years and pre-school education in rural areas in particular,

serious consideration should be given to providing appropriate care and resources for the pre-school education of children with specific disabilities,

the various implications of transporting children of pre-school age should be carefully examined in the light of their basic needs,

c. Identification of the methods which have proved most successful and cost-effective

7. Considering that:

members of the conference had constantly in mind the centrality of the child and his environment,

It is recommended that:

the child's pre-school education should not alienate him from his environment, therefore such provision should be made in an environment close to that of the child's home, both in terms of distance and similarity,

the adults charged with educating and caring for the young child should be familiar with and able to share the culture which is familiar to the child,

pre-school establishments in sparsely-populated areas should devise strategies for the involvement and active participation of parents (and other concerned adults), and should encourage continuous home visiting.

8. Considering that:

pre-school children, wherever they live, have a right to educational provisions of the highest standard possible,

It is recommended that:

the basic training and qualifications of pre-school teachers should be of a high standard,

teachers in rural schools should have some previous experience in a less isolated situation,

continuous and appropriate forms of in-service training should be made available to all pre-school educators serving in rural areas,

pre-school teachers should be trained to evaluate the potential of materials to stimulate children's play, and to exploit natural materials and those readily available locally,

the training of teachers for rural schools should enable them to deal with specialised problems which their pupils may have, but which may not be catered for by other services.

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9. Considering that:

the facilities provided for pre-school establishments should match the specific needs of the children,

It is recommended that:

those responsible (including educators, architects and interested members of the community) for designing new and/or adapted buildings and for selecting new equipment, should be sensitive to the particular needs of rural children and alert to the limitations and/or potentialities of commercially produced materials,

models of pre-school provision in rural areas should be concerned with flexibility and the imaginative use of available resources. Teachers and parents should be actively involved in the planning of such provisions, in order to ensure that they satisfy the separate and joint requirements of children, parents and teachers.

10. Considering that:

programmes provided by television and radio networks can complement but in no way replace vital contacts of the child with adults and with other children,

It is recommended that:

television and radio networks, including cassettes, slides and video tape, should be encouraged and suitably subsidised to provide material adapted to a comprehensive pre-school service, in which the content of the programmes bears a direct relationship to the needs of children, parents and teachers in the area involved,

any such experiment should be accompanied by careful monitoring used in a flexible way, adapted to the context in which it is used.

11. Considering that:

the provision of pre-school education in sparsely populated areas usually necessitates the provision of transport, adapted to meet local circumstances,

It is recommended that:

the journey should not cause undue fatigue,

supervision should be provided both during the journeys and the waiting time, in order to avoid accidents and to make the journey a part of the child's educative experience,

research into this aspect of the child's experience should be undertaken, since knowledge is at present scarce and inadequate.

12. Considering that:

continuity between pre-school and primary school education is judged to be essential (v. the report of the symposium held at Bournemouth in March 1977, doc. CCC/EGT (77) 20, Consolidated recommendations, 4.3),

It is recommended that:

co-operation with primary schools should be considered essential and each area should devise means of ensuring that this takes place,

to facilitate this co-operation, all the personnel concerned should come under the responsibility of the local or regional educational authorities.

In conclusion, a final recommendation was made, as follows:

13. Considering that:

members of the conference felt that concern about providing the opportunity for pre-school education should be a growing concern,

It is recommended that:

the Council for Cultural Co-operation should continue to be actively involved in the field of pre-school education and should act as a collector and disseminator of information among the member states, so that the impact and value of the pre-school project should not be lost.

A P P E N D I X A

I REPORT OF THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING GROUP

1. STUDY TYPES OF PROVISION OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN SPARSELY POPULATED AREAS IN CCC MEMBER STATES

i. Considering that it is impossible to define sparsely populated areas by referring solely to geographical features and density of population because of the multiplicity of conditions represented by the member states, our first consideration is the child in the isolated family and the handicapping effects of isolation whatever the cause, eg both parents working long hours, ethnic differences, inadequate housing, lack of amenities, poor communications and sheer poverty.

ii. It is agreed that it is impossible to separate the welfare of the child from that of the family and that any action taken on behalf of children from 0 to school age must form part of a wider framework of support for individual families and the small community as a whole. The social network includes:

- professional help from the publicly administered services;
- relationships within the home;
- the interaction of families with the community;
- the effect of the media and local resources;
- the support given by key persons in the community (including voluntary organisations).

The co-operation and co-ordination of health, education and social services is essential if we are to form a framework of support and care for the whole family. Careful consideration must be given to the strength and quality of these services; they must be staffed by men and women with considerable insight into the needs of the area they serve.

iii. It is agreed that pre-school is one of the most promising areas in which to overcome the effects of isolation, and to accommodate preventive strategies in the earliest years.

The group identified a number of difficulties attached to the interpretation of compensatory education. For instance, a too deliberate attempt at structuring compensatory education could:

- result in an over-emphasis on socio-economic and cultural differences, thereby resulting in the opposite effect;
- overlook the advantages of life in a sparsely populated area and lead to an over-concentration on filling the gaps in children's experience as opposed to exploiting their strengths.

The group defined the role of pre-school in these terms:

- to create a match between the basic needs of all children;
- to match the individual needs of each child within the group;
- to provide facilities appropriate to particular circumstances (in the terms of this symposium "sparsely populated areas").

There was also a consensus of opinion about the need to identify radical changes in the pre-school provision:

- the co-ordination of available services in order to create a variety of types of provision appropriate to the needs of each area, and the persons in it;
- the involvement and participation of parents without which no form of provision can be fully effective;
- the importance of continuous discussion and interaction at all levels between those responsible for the stability and care of the family as a whole.

It is recommended that:

A. through the development of effective co-ordination of available resources and services in sparsely populated areas, parents as well as children should be helped to uphold and enhance constructive relationships within the family and the community;

B. any action taken on behalf of children from 0 to school age must form part of a wider framework of support for individual families and the small community as a whole;

C. the parameters of pre-school education shall include the basic, individual, and environmental needs of the children;

D. effective alternative provision for scattered areas must depend on the close partnership of parents, children, pre-school educators, the local community, and the providers of these facilities.

II. THE IDENTIFICATION OF PROBLEMS CONNECTED WITH ESTABLISHING PRE-SCHOOL FACILITIES IN SPARSELY POPULATED AREAS IN VIEW OF PRACTICAL AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS, TRADITIONS, CULTURAL VALUES, ETC

Considering that the range of problems clearly defined by members of the group (excluding internationally recognised financial strictures) included:

- relating the child's identity to the cultures and values of the community in which he lives in such a way that he becomes "the subject and not the object" of the endeavour;

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- the need to provide appropriate facilities and help for the education of physically and mentally handicapped children and their parents;

- parental reluctance to understand and to accept pre-school education and the difficulties involved in getting the right kind of information to the general public;

- the danger of a teacher's personal and professional capacities being affected by living and working in an isolated area;

- difficulties involved in making close and effective links between

  a. pre-school and parents

  b. pre-school and primary school

- decisions about whether children should be transported to the pre-school facilities, or whether appropriate ways should be found of taking the facilities to the children

It is recommended that:

A. there should be no relaxation of effort to make the general public and those who administer their affairs increasingly aware of the importance of the early years and pre-school education in rural areas in particular;

B. serious consideration should be given to providing appropriate care and resources for the pre-school education of children with suspected or diagnosed physical and/or mental handicaps;

C. the various implications of transporting children of pre-school age should be carefully examined in the light of their basic needs.

III. THE IDENTIFICATION OF METHODS WHICH HAVE PROVED MOST SUCCESSFUL AND COST EFFECTIVE

Considering

ii. Co-operation with the children's families

- home visiting by teachers on the staff of the pre-school;
- home visiting by peripatetic advisory teachers;
- organisation of media libraries;
- involvement and participation by all parents in a wide variety of activities within pre-school establishments;
- meetings for parents (and other concerned adults) and/or conferences attended jointly by parents and teachers;

- the establishment by the pre-school of sessional groups for younger children and their families;
- extra-mural activities and practical help on special occasions.

iii. Staff and staff training.

- the younger the child the greater the necessity for a more generous teacher/child ratio;
- the training and qualifications for pre-school teachers should in no way be inferior to that of primary teachers (cf. the Versailles recommendations 1975), and teachers in rural schools should, if possible, have enough experience to enable them to support children and families in isolated areas. Only by making wider contacts with colleagues and others in the community and region can these teachers avoid being themselves affected by conditions of isolation;
- in-service training is particularly important for teachers in sparsely populated areas.

iv. Requirements for premises, equipment, and educational materials.
and
v.
- educationists, architects, and interested members of the community should co-operate on designing briefs for new and/or adopted buildings in order to produce an environment which offers a variety of opportunities matching the varied needs of pre-school children and their educators;
- equipment provided should be clearly relevant to the basic needs of the children in any particular group. Maximum use should be made of natural materials and environmental resources;
- staff, children, and parents need help with the selection and use of mass media. In-service training should enable pre-school to produce and select AVA materials relevant to their own children's interests and opportunities offered by the immediate environment. Teachers should be able to advise television companies on programmes suitable for use by children, teachers, and parents;
- all provision should be planned in accordance with health and safety regulations.

vi. School bussing

- where possible, journeys should be avoided, but where transport has to be provided serious consideration must be given to the mode of transport, length, and timing of journeys, and problems concerning the need for a capable escort;
- there is a need for adequate research in this area.

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vii. Models of organisation

The range of models for rural areas described by members of the conference makes it impossible to generalise in matters concerning organisation. There was however a consensus of opinion that only flexibility and imaginative use of available resources would produce styles of pre-school provision appropriate to such a wide variety of needs.

1. Co-operation with school
(Members of the group felt that this item should be placed here)

Good liaison between pre-school and school is particularly important for children, parents and teachers in widely scattered areas; it is, however, correspondingly difficult to achieve. The group wishes to draw the attention of the conference to the comments and recommendations relating to this subject proposed at the Bournemouth symposium.

It is recommended that:

A. pre-school establishments in sparsely populated areas should devise strategies for the involvement and active participation of parents (and other concerned adults), and for a system of regular home visiting;

B. that continuous and appropriate forms of in-service training should be made available to all pre-school educators serving in rural areas;

C. those responsible (including pre-school educators and other members of the community) for designing and for selection of new equipment and/or adapted pre-school premises, should be sensitive to the particular needs of rural children and alert to the limitations and/or potentialities of commercially produced materials;

D. models of pre-school provision in these areas should be concerned with flexibility and imaginative use of available resources. The separate and joint requirements of children, teachers, and parents should be constantly in the minds of the planners;

E. television and radio networks including cassettes, slides, and video tapes should be encouraged and suitably subsidised to provide a comprehensive pre-school service in which the content of the programmes bears a direct relationship to the needs of children, parents, and teachers in the area involved. Any such experiment should be accompanied by a system of careful monitoring used in a flexible way adapted to the experience of the day.

FINALLY, it is strongly recommended that the Council of Europe should continue to be actively involved in the field of pre-schoool education so that the impact and value of the four conferences shall not be lost.

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II REPORT OF THE FRENCH-SPEAKING GROUP

This symposium, the last of the series which commenced in Venice in 1971, confirms the essential principle of the right of each child to education. Education should promote each child's physical and mental health, uncover individual potential, actualise it, develop it and help it to mature.

I. STUDY TYPES OF PROVISION OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN SPARSELY POPULATED AREAS IN CCC MEMBER STATES

1. What reasons justify a particular effort to provide pre-school education in sparsely populated areas?

A few points will illustrate our position in favour of this education:

a. Children develop more quickly during the first five years of their life than at any other period.

b. Their experiences during these five years have an important and determining influence on their intellectual, emotional and social development.

c. The amount and richness of stimuli can have an effect on future behaviour and attitudes in relation to basic learning.

d. Play activities allow teachers, when observing both spontaneous and more structured games, to evaluate the level of maturity of the fundamental needs of each child. Taking this observation as a starting point, each teacher can determine programmes for intervening in the children's games in order to prompt them to participate more actively and more efficiently, thus enlarging and reinforcing children's experiences.

e. Owing to its welcoming atmosphere, the pre-school allows the meeting of, and exchanges between, small children, and thus encourages socialisation.

f. Language is essential for all aspects of development; pre-school education offers excellent opportunities for enriching it, in particular for those children who come from linguistically poor backgrounds, and should help them first of all to speak the language of their group which is the starting point for all communication.

2. How can sparsely populated areas be described and characterised in relation to urban areas?

A sparsely populated area is one where the number of pupils, for a variety of reasons, falls below the norms required for forming pre-school classes in the country in which it is situated.

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3. What compensatory role does the pre-school play in sparsely populated areas?

The pre-school prevents the children from feeling:

a. a great unease on their arrival at school because they have had few previous opportunities for contacts with the outside world;

b. an obvious shyness on entering a vast, new community;

c. constraint with fellow pupils, and

d. incapacity to understand instructions and information, due to differences of accent, attitude and language.

In short, children in rural areas seem to be disadvantaged in comparison with children living in towns, both in their language and in their social behaviour. In all fairness, we must not try to get rid of the differences which exist between children from different backgrounds, but it is desirable to stimulate and strengthen every child in the realisation of his own individual potential.

II. IDENTIFY PROBLEMS CONNECTED WITH ESTABLISHING PRE-SCHOOL FACILITIES IN SPARSELY POPULATED AREAS IN VIEW OF PRACTICAL AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS, TRADITIONS, CULTURAL VALUES, ETC

- The rural school, and more especially the rural nursery school, is one of the centres of attraction in a village. It should be the tool of all, and everyone should be concerned with the way it works and what happens in it.

- It should dispense a harmonious and optimal education which does not cut children off from their own environment but helps them to understand and appreciate it better. In so doing, it allows them to adapt, in a spirit of openness and tolerance, to other environments.

- Experiments carried out in sparsely populated areas indicate that pre-school teachers have fulfilled the constant functions of pre-school education: the socialisation of the children, psycho-motor equilibrium, understanding of the bodily system, intellectual challenges, appeals to creativity, artistic awakenings.

- Particular importance should be paid to contacts with parents. It is therefore, a good idea to enlist the support of the parents - the majority of whom have also had to live in isolated conditions - for nursery schools.

  Due to their contacts with other parents, it will perhaps be possible to encourage them to re-think their role as educators, and even to integrate themselves more fully into the community.

The diversity of possible solutions proves that there can be no ready-made model, especially as the adaptability to local conditions continues to be the key to success.

III. IDENTIFY THE METHODS (FOR EXAMPLE MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL BUS, BUSSING, TV PROGRAMMES) WHICH HAVE PROVED MOST SUCCESSFUL AND COST EFFECTIVE

1. Co-operation with the primary school is not only desirable, but still acknowledged to be indispensable. Various situations may occur:

. give the personnel of schools which are at some distance from one another the possibilities to, and the means of, meeting;

. in order to facilitate co-ordination with the primary school, it is desirable that all the personnel concerned come under the responsibility of the local or regional education authorities.

2. A pre-requisite to co-operation with parents is their being informed about the pre-school. This is even more necessary in certain critical situations:

. it is important to convince parents of the usefulness of such establishments, to invite them to register their children and to give their support;

. contacts with the parents of the young pupils are most necessary to ensure that the educational influence exercised by the two environments (home and school) are convergent and complementary;

. the pre-school - centre of attraction - becomes a privileged place where parents' questions can be answered. Measures are taken, in accordance with the enthusiasm of the educators, for information sessions - "open days". It is also important that parents and educators work together in order to convince local authorities of the necessity of setting up pre-schools, or, at least, of offering the possibility of pre-school education.

Furthermore, those responsible at a national level should urge local authorities to take the necessary initiatives.

By establishing strong links with the authorities and the families, the nursery class or pre-school makes an essential contribution to the next stage of education.

It has been proved that a pre-school establishment arouses interest and a desire to contribute, not only on the part of the parents, authorities and teachers concerned, but also on the part of all the local inhabitants.

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3. Staff and staff training

- Staff in pre-school establishments in sparsely populated areas should have the same basic training as any other member of staff of the same level, and this should be supplemented by:

  a. knowledge of the cultural and sociological aspects of the environment;

  b. an appropriate didactic and methodological specialisation.

- It is desirable that the staff have some experience in pre-school education before tackling the specific problems found in sparsely populated areas.

- The staff should have the benefit of different kinds of in-service training, organised by the authorities, and with the particular aim of helping children in difficult situations wherever there are no specialised agencies.

4. Requirements for premises and equipment

As far as possible, teaching should be conducted in neutral and stationary premises. Taking into account the specific needs of young children (need for rest, need for movement, need for security, greater susceptibility to infection, etc), the premises should offer the best possible conditions of comfort - without being luxurious. These conditions should be respected both when developing premises and when building new ones.

The material, well adapted for young children, should also be simple: mobile and polyvalent, it can be adapted and used in several ways.

Attention should be given to the safety factor in the design of materials and equipment, due to the inexperience of very young children. The family, and indeed all the local population, should be invited to take part in the planning, developing and even the making of material. In this way, each collaborator will be even more interested and concerned, the greater his own participation.

5. Bussing

Whatever the means of transport chosen on the basis of geographical conditions, two demands must be met:

a. the journey should not become a cause of strain, 30 minutes is a maximum;

b. the risk of accidents should be avoided: this may necessitate supervision both whilst waiting for the transport and during the actual journey. Furthermore, the early instruction of the young traveller should be assured jointly by the parents and educators.

Whenever the journey exceeds 30 minutes, a peripatetic teacher should be employed. She should meet each group of children at least twice a week, and may also leave material and propose activities to be carried out when she is not present. This presupposes parent participation.

6. Television, radio and the other media, which have rigid programmes and are answerable to imperatives alien to the specific needs of each group, are very difficult to use in classes for young children. They cannot replace the invaluable relationships "children-children" and "children-adults". They are of use only if they can be miniaturised and flexible enough to become a tool which the teacher can use (slides, films, records, video tapes).

7. Models of organisation

These should be very flexible, and the setting out of the week day and the holidays should be well adapted to the living conditions of the families (climate, seasons, rhythm of work, etc).

Financial grounds cannot be accepted as justification for the lack of organised pre-school education for all children.

Furthermore, this education should be free: no child should be deprived of it because of his family's financial situation.

III. REPORT OF THE MIXED GROUP

With reference to pre-school education it was not possible to limit the notion to sparsely populated areas.

I. PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IS OPEN TO ALL CHILDREN WHETHER THEY ARE ISOLATED GEOGRAPHICALLY OR FOR OTHER REASONS

One of the goals of pre-school education is to reduce all kinds of inequalities. For that it should play an educational, social and compensatory role and should meet the specific needs of each child.

Before analysing the means of implementing pre-school education the group wondered about the knowledge of the needs of rural children and their parents.

It appears that we do not have adequate information on the factors which determine needs and the methods to be implemented.

1st recommendation

It would be necessary to have an in-depth analysis of the political, economic and sociological characteristics of rural environments in all the member states in order to draw up a list of essential means for the implementation of pre-school education.

The general goals of pre-school education are the same whether they are related to children from urban or rural milieux.

In rural environments the importance of pre-school education is all the greater in that it concerns a population which is isolated, where there are problems of communication, which is deprived, entirely or partially, of the equipment and social services, and which is undergoing deep changes through the infiltration of urban values to the detriment of rural values.

These general considerations have led to the second recommendation:

2nd recommendation

The means used to give rural children equality of opportunity should be defined as a response to the specific needs of each child or each group of children while preserving and developing their local culture.

To define the methods necessary, the group sought a basic orientation: is it necessary to establish specific institutions or is it possible to envisage pre-school education in the family?

Setting-up specific facilities was not seen as essential but there are several arguments in favour of assembling children in a school: the rural child needs to experience a community of children, the better to know others and himself and to situate himself in his environment. If the solution of an institution is envisaged, the group insists on the following three points:

3rd recommendation

1. Pre-school education should not be experienced by children as a break from their environment. This implies setting up a school in an environment close to the one he comes from.

2. Pre-school education should be given by an adult similar to those adults whom the child knows, especially with reference to language.

3. Pre-school education ought to be carried out in co-operation with the family and the community.

It is important to develop contacts between teachers and parents so as to transform certain negative attitudes on the one hand or a passive acceptance on the other in order to establish, in the interests of the child, a reciprocal understanding and real co-operation.

4th recommendation

The setting up of a centre for pre-school education presumes the development and assessment of programmes which relate both to children and to parents.

The group considered co-operation between parents and teachers in the following manners:

- exchange of information on the child, his attitudes, his reactions, his psychological needs etc;

- various responses to the various needs expressed;

- enhancement of the child's situation through the interest expressed by his parents.

This co-operation can be carried out in the following ways:

- individual and informal discussions between parents and teachers, either at school or at any other place;

- institutionalised framework such as parent committees or parent associations;

- specific structures created by the state for the physical and mental welfare of the child.

This co-operation is considered such an important need at the level of pre-school education that the group expressed a wish that teachers be prepared for this activity.

5th recommendation

Basic teacher training should include information for parents, an ability to listen to them, and co-operation between parents and teachers in every possible way. This co-operation was thought to be so complex, so delicate to achieve, and so difficult to put into practice that the group felt it could only be implemented by highly qualified teachers.

6th recommendation

Pre-school education should only be given by qualified teachers. The younger the child, the more difficult the task becomes and the higher the level of teacher training should be. The findings of the Leyden Symposium still stand and were approved by the group.

The high level of qualifications for teachers should make it possible to use educational material in a better way. Too often, an abundance of material in schools keeps children busy and the teacher no longer has time to educate them.

Educational material is necessary in so far as it replaces what the child cannot find directly in his own environment, but it should be selected on the basis of how it stimulates.

7th recommendation

Teachers should be informed of the pedagogical interest of educational material, so that children can derive benefit from its use.

Moreover, they should also be able to choose the material which appears to be most beneficial for the child.

Bussing

The group has already indicated its preference for the creation of pre-school centres near to the children's homes. This implies that the transport of children should only be envisaged when other solutions are impossible. The main points on which the members of the group insist are:

- transport should not be seen in terms of distance, but in terms of length of journey;

- transport presupposes the setting up of strict regulations on the safety of the children being transported;

- the necessity of foreseeing a welcome service in the schools, which should also possess rest and relaxation rooms.

8th recommendation

When the transport of children is inevitable and indispensable, it should be conceived in terms of length of journey, distance, and comfort compatible with the health and safety of the children.

Organisation of education

The group considered that it was not possible to favour one solution, because each situation required a specific solution. However, consensus was reached that the creation of a pre-school centre, in accordance with the conditions outlined above, represented the most desirable situation.

On other occasions, other solutions which have been tried out (eg mobile classes, peripatetic teachers, use of television, etc) could be used.

The group insisted that when any solutions were being envisaged by local authorities, studies and research should be carried out with the participation of all those interested, and especially parents and teachers.

9th recommendation

The organisation of pre-school centres should not adhere rigidly to any one pattern, but reply to the possibilities and wishes of the community.

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APPENDIX B / ANNEXE B

Symposium on "Pre-school education for children living in sparsely populated areas"

Storlien (Sweden) 11-16 September 1977

Symposium sur "l'éducation préscolaire dans les régions à faible densité de population"

Storlien (Suède) 11-16 septembre 1977

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